

7. Sociological Foundations

MODERN civilization has cast its pervasive influence on human life. Technological change, inseparable from and a part of the process of modern civilization itself, is not, as many seem to think, merely a means of increasing production and reducing costs. Besides the complex technical and economic problems it brings in its train, the whole scale of psychological and cultural values are affected by its 'onslaught'.¹

We call ourselves civilized: What precisely do we mean by it? Definitions vary, for men differ in their approaches and there is no standardized philosophy of life.

The Oxford Dictionary defines civilization as 'an advanced stage in social development'.

In 1926 a book was published, *What is Civilization?* To it contributed such people of esteem as Maurice Maeterlinck, Dhan Gopal Mukherji, Dr. Du Bois, and Chi-Fiung Lu, and it carried an introduction by the famous historian of civilizations, Hendrik Van Loon. The publishers posed the question in their own introduction: Was civilization 'railroads, telegraphs, skyscrapers and open plumbing? Is it the conquest of the air and of disease? Is it literature and art, philosophy and religion, the superlative excellence of the few, or the greatest good of the greatest number?' "In this age of vast material progress" they added, "too many of us are prone to limit our definition of civilization by the very prejudices born of our own particular way of culture...to regard civilization in terms of our mechanistic achievements, and to look down pityingly from the altitude of our progress to the backwardness of other times and people."

In his introduction Van Loon declared against these material things. One could be a great scientist, he wrote, "and remain as uncivilized as baboon", and the thing called progress had "as little to do with civilized existence as a favourable trade balance or telegraph poles." For civilization, in his opinion, "is essentially a question of the inner spirit."

Answering the question for India, Dhan Gopal Mukherji reports a holy man sitting above the river at Benaras as saying: 'It is not enough to be prosperous and have every member of a community well-to-do. A community must produce its holy man if it wishes to gain the freedom of the city of God. Even in these degenerate days India has not failed at her central task. Behold, she has given birth to Gandhi.'

In India, Gandhi has been the most prominent of the thinkers and the leaders who gave serious consideration to the social and valuational aspects of modern civilization.

Gandhi on modern civilization

Gandhi did not consider modern civilization as true civilization. Modern civilization was 'Satanic' or a representation of the 'Black Age'. Much that passed in the name of civilization was no civilization at all. He considered civilization not in terms of quantitative and physical achievements but from the standpoint he considered to be religious or moral.

*Hind Swaraj*² or Indian Home Rule records the classic statement of Gandhi's views on modern civilization. One finds in this small pamphlet the quintessence of the social credo of Gandhi. Though he advanced from his original position in his later days, as we shall duly note in course of our discussion (see also ch. 8, sec. 'Evolution of Views on Industrialism and Machinery'), yet he moved within the basic matrix of values as postulated in the book.

In *Hind Swaraj* he wrote: "The people of Europe today live in better built houses than they did a hundred years ago. This is considered an emblem of civilization, and this is also a matter to promote bodily happiness. Formerly they wore skins and used spears as their weapons. Now, they wear long

trousers...and instead of spears they carry with them revolvers... Formerly in Europe, people ploughed their land mainly by manual labour. Now one man can plough a vast track by means of steam engines and can thus amass wealth. This is called a sign of civilization. Formerly, only a few men wrote valuable books. Now, anybody writes and prints anything he likes and poisons people's minds. Formerly, men travelled in waggons. Now, they fly through the air in trains at the rate of four hundred and more miles per day. This is considered the height of civilization. It has been stated that as men progress, they shall be able to travel in airship and reach any part of the world in a few hours. Men will not need the use of their hands and feet. They will press a button and they will have their clothing by their side....Everything will be done by machinery...now it is possible to take away thousands of lives by one man working behind a gun from a hill. This is civilization. Formerly, men worked in the open air only as much as they liked. Now...they are obliged to work at the risk of their lives, at most dangerous occupations for the sake of millionaires. Formerly, men were made slaves under physical compulsion. Now they are enslaved by temptation of money and of the luxuries that money can buy. There are now diseases of which people never dreamt before....This civilization takes note neither of morality nor of religion....Civilization seeks to increase bodily comforts, and it fails miserably even in doing so.

"This civilization is irreligion, and it has taken such a hold on the people in Europe that those who are in it appear to be half mad....They keep their energy by intoxication. They can hardly be happy in solitude. Women, who should be the queens of household, wander in the streets or they slave away in factories...."^s

The civilization which did not take into account morality, had no appeal for Gandhi as it had no place in India.

Background

In a letter written from London on October 14, 1906, to H. S. L. Polak who was then in Madras, Gandhi expressed

his views on modern civilization, which were later incorporated in *Hind Swaraj*.⁴ To quote from the letter :

"1. There is no impassable barrier between East and West.

"2. There is no such thing as western or European civilization, but there is a modern civilization which is purely material.

"3. The people of Europe, before they were touched by modern civilization, had much in common with the people of the East ; anyhow the people of India, and even today the Europeans who are not touched by modern civilization, are far better able to mix with the Indians than the offspring of that civilization.

"4. It is not the British people who are ruling India, but it is modern civilization, through its railways, telegraph, telephone, and almost every invention which has been claimed to be a triumph of civilization.

"5. Bombay, Calcutta, and the other chief cities of India are the real plague-spots.

"6. If British rule were replaced tomorrow by Indian rule based on modern methods, India would be no better, except that she would be able to retain some of the money that is drained away to England ; but then India would only become a second or fifth nation of Europe or America.

"7. East and West can really meet when the West has thrown overboard modern civilization, almost in its entirety. They can also seemingly meet when East has also adopted modern civilization, but that meeting would be an armed truce, even as it is between, say, Germany and England, both of which nations are living in the Hall of Death in order to avoid being devoured, the one by the other.

"8. It is impertinence for any man or any body of men to begin or to contemplate reform of the whole world. To attempt to do so by means of highly artificial and speedy locomotion, is to attempt the impossible.

"9. Increase of material comforts, it may be generally laid down, does not in any way whatsoever conduce to moral growth.

"10. Medical science is concentrated essence of black magic. Quackery is infinitely preferable to what passes for high medical skill as such.

"11. Hospitals are the instruments that the Devil has been using for his own purpose, in order to keep his hold on his kingdom. They perpetuate vice, misery and degradation and real slavery. I was entirely off the track when I considered that I should receive a medical training. It would be sinful for me in any way whatsoever to take part in the abominations that go in the hospitals. If there were no hospitals for venereal diseases, or even for consumptives, we should have less consumption, and less sexual vice amongst us.

"12. India's salvation consists in unlearning what she has learnt during the past fifty years or so. The railways, telegraphs, hospitals, lawyers, doctors, and such like have all to go, and the so-called upper classes have to learn to live conscientiously and religiously and deliberately the simple life of a peasant knowing it to be a life giving true happiness.

"13. India should wear no machine-made clothing, whether it comes out of European mills or Indian mills.

"14. England can help India to do this, and then she will have justified her hold on India. There seems to be many in England today who think likewise.

"15. There was true wisdom in the sages of old having so regulated society as to limit the material conditions of the people : the rude plough of perhaps five thousand years ago is the plough of the husbandman today. Therein lies salvation. People live long under such conditions, in comparative peace much greater than Europe has enjoyed after having taken up modern activity, and I feel that every enlightened man, certainly every Englishman, may, if he chooses, learn this truth and act according to it."

During his stay in London (July 10 to November 13, 1909) in connexion with the Transvaal Indian deputation, Gandhi 'read much, pondered much' and discussed things with Indians of all shades of opinion, nationalists, constitutionalists and

terrorists, and with as many Englishmen as it was possible for him to meet. As he debated with them his views were taking shape. The conclusions he arrived at appeared to Gandhi to be final. And this sense of urgency impelled him to write the famous classic, *Hind Swaraj* during his return voyage to South Africa on board the s.s. *Kildonan Castle*.

Gandhi faced a world seized with the malady of violence and racial barbarism and inhuman exploitation. This ugly aspect of civilization repelled him. He was opposed to Western civilization not because it was western in origin, but because it struck at the roots of the values that India stood for—those which represented, for Gandhi at least, the basic human values.

Gandhi's moral and spiritual approach resulted in his bitter disillusionment with modern civilization as represented by the West. As one deeply influenced by the traditional values of Indian society he could not withstand the crude, vulgar materialistic and aggressive aspects of Western civilization. The mechanization and the consequent de-humanization of man—the chief symptoms of modern civilization—were revolting to such a sensitive soul as Gandhi. As a reaction against this horrifying aspect of industrial civilization he longed for the simple, pristine life. There he was in company with Rousseau and Tolstoy. He wanted to go back to agriculture and craft economy like Carlyle and Ruskin who wrote eloquent testimonies—in the moving and spirited language in which they were unsurpassed masters—to human sufferings that came ravagingly as a sequel to the industrial revolution in England.

Reasons for Gandhi's antipathy towards modern civilization

Very many causes have been suggested for Gandhi's antipathy towards modern civilization. These reasons may be summed up as follows :

1. renunciation of the material advantages conferred by modern industry gives a compensating moral or magic power to those who practise it.

2. the idea of the ethical and practical superiority of the non-violent method over the violent one which too he had associated with the East and the West respectively as early as 1896, might have taken some part in urging him towards asceticism, and was principally responsible for his opposition to industrialism.

3. the puritanical, independent strain in his mind might have led him the same way. Persons of this type, just as they would prefer to be independent of servants, even at the expense of much time and energy, would also prefer to be independent of machinery. Machinery is 'unnatural', they feel. Gandhi's remark that 'Men will not need the use of their hands and feet' in an industrialized society, or that '...where means of artificial locomotion have increased, the health of the people has suffered', or again, his stress on the 'natural' in food and medicine goes to show that he too felt it this way.

4. the Hindu conception of *Rta* is analogous to the belief held by the Greeks that interference with the course of nature is impious. (For Gandhi's conception of *Rta*, see ch. 3, p. 94 *supra*) This might have played a part in Gandhi's opposition to industrialism.

5. the matter of religion had its effect upon Gandhi. Many of the critics and supporters of industrialism point out that it tends to weaken and destroy religious belief, and Gandhi must have been aware of it.⁶ 'This civilization is irreligion', he said.

6. Gandhi's opposition to industrial civilization was partly the consequence of his 'empty mission' (Transvaal Deputation to London in 1909).⁶

Gandhi's feelings of unfriendly antagonism to Western civilization were confirmed by the hypocrisy, the insincerity, the politics of discrimination and persecution and even inhumanity of the ruling white group in South Africa. The rampant racialism in that country repelled the sensitive soul of Gandhi. That was the situational context of the *Hind Swaraj* which became the philosophical and sociological foundation of the *satyāgraha* movement from 1908 to 1914.⁷

Sources of influence

The reasons suggested above have, no doubt, some validity in so far as they help us understand the background of his mental development as also of his views on civilization systematically elucidated in *Hind Swaraj*.

How did Gandhi explain his own standpoint? In the Preface to the Gujarati Edition of *Hind Swaraj* he wrote: "These views are mine, and yet not mine. They are mine because I hope to act according to them. They are almost a part of my being. But, yet, they are not mine, because I lay no claim to originality. They have been formed after reading several books. That which I dimly felt received support from these books."⁸

Elsewhere he commented: "Whilst the views expressed in *Hind Swaraj* are held by me, I have but endeavoured humbly to follow Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau, Emerson and other writers, besides the masters of Indian philosophy. Tolstoy has been one of my teachers for a number of years."⁹

As is well known, Tolstoy condemned the whole edifice of modern civilization built up by economics and science. In his cherished divine kingdom, there was no place for these things. In his words: "Science is meaningless because it gives no answer to our question, the only question important for us, 'what shall we do and how shall we live'." In his severe condemnation of ecclesiasticism, Darwinism and contemporary science and art he urged a return to the simple innocence of the Gospels.

Ruskin's influence on Gandhi is too well known to be discussed here. (See ch. 8, sec. 'Ruskin's Influence on Gandhi'.)

Gandhi referred to Carpenter's *Civilization, Its Cause and Cure* in the text of the book (ch. 6).

Around the time that Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj*, he also wrote and published a Gujarati translation of Plato's *Defence and Death of Socrates* in the columns of *Indian Opinion* from 4.4.1908 to 9.5.1908.¹⁰ Dr. Viswanath Prasad Varma writes: "...I have a strong feeling that in those days he might have been influenced by Plato's ideas and specially his criticism

against doctors and lawyers. Plato in his *Republic* had advocated that every man should be his own lawyer and doctor."¹¹ This 'feeling' is worth consideration.

'True Civilization'

We have addressed ourselves in the foregoing sections to an understanding of Gandhi's critique of modern civilization. Now to turn to what Gandhi called 'true civilization'.

How did Gandhi define 'true civilization'? He defined civilization "as that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty."¹² Performance of duty and observance of morality were for Gandhi convertible terms. And morality was nothing but the attainment of mastery over mind and passions. If true civilization meant 'good conduct'* (he pointed out that the Gujarati equivalent of civilization meant 'good conduct'), India had "nothing to learn from anybody else, and this as it should be." He wrote: "I believe that the civilization India has evolved is not to be beaten in the world. Nothing can equal the seeds sown by our ancestors. Rome went, Greece shared the same fate; the might of the Pharaohs was broken; Japan has become westernized; of China nothing can be said; but India is still, somehow or other, sound at the foundation. The people of Europe learn their lessons from the writings of the men of Greece and Rome, which exist no longer in their former glory. In trying to learn from them, the Europeans imagine that they will avoid the mistakes of Greece and Rome. Such is their pitiable condition. In the midst of all this India remains immovable and that is her glory."¹³

Gandhi believed that the India of ancient times was an ideal representation of true civilization. This romantic attitude towards ancient Indian civilization is further evident from the following: "India has nothing to learn from anybody else, and

* cf. Rabindranath in his classic testament *Crisis in Civilization* (1941) where he says: "That phase of civilization with which we were familiar in this country has been called by Manu *sad-âchâr* (lit. proper conduct), that is, the conduct prescribed by the tradition of the race." (*Visva-Bharati*, Calcutta, 1961), pp. 11-12.

this is as it should be. We notice that the mind is a restless bird ; the more it gets the more it wants, and still remains unsatisfied. The more we indulge our passions the more unbridled they become. Our ancestors, therefore, set a limit to our indulgences. They saw that happiness was largely a mental condition. A man is not necessarily happy because he is rich, or unhappy because he is poor. The rich are often seen to be unhappy, the poor to be happy. Millions will always remain poor. Observing all this, our ancestors dissuaded us from luxuries and pleasures. We have managed with the same kind of plough as existed thousands of years ago. We have retained the same kind of cottages that we had in former times and our indigenous education remains the same as before. We have had no system of life-corroding competition....It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre."¹⁴ For the ancient Indians large cities were a snare and a useless encumbrance where people would not be happy and where "there would be gangs of thieves and robbers, prostitution and vice flourishing in them and (that) poor men would be robbed by rich men."¹⁵ They were satisfied with small villages ; for them 'the kings and their swords' were inferior to 'the sword of ethics' and the sovereigns of the earth were inferior to the Rsis and the Fakirs.¹⁶ The lawyers and doctors were there, but they were within bounds. They were considered people's dependants, not their masters. Justice was tolerably fair and there was a life of independence for the common people.¹⁷

This India represented 'true civilization' to Gandhi—one which was supposedly based on God, and the purpose of which was to elevate moral being. West, on the other hand, was godless and immoral.

In his yearning for the resuscitation of the values of ancient India Gandhi was here found to be propagating the philosophy of Hundred Per Cent Indian.¹⁸ Ancient Indian civilization, so it seemed to Gandhi, represented the climactic point in the history of mankind.

Political Ends & Cultural Means

As we have seen above in Gandhi's letter to Polak, his opposition to the West was not merely on the limited ground of political and economic subjection, but on the much wider issue of the conflict of civilizational values. But this does not mean that politics and culture were isolable categories for Gandhi.

Dr. Paul F. Power observes on this point : "Gandhi was vitally concerned with the politico-cultural relations of the East and the West. In several respects influenced by both civilizations, he was well qualified to distinguish between politics and culture. But he postulated their interdependency, as he did of all branches of life, and this prevented him from treating them as related although not necessarily interdependent. Thus he was certain that the West employed its cultural ideas and techniques to keep the East in colonial subjection ; and in turn he used cultural means to achieve his political ends."¹⁹

It is true that Gandhi associated modernism with the British rule in India. Prof. D. P. Mukerji in this connexion pointed out : "Strictly from the point of view of the propagation of an answering faith, this mixture of basic values with nationalism was excellent. A sociologist would not cavil at it. Technological values are usually associated with the nationalist values, particularly in the eastern countries in the period of their anti-imperialist struggle. It centres in their opposition to the obstacles that imperialism places in their economic growth, and also in the period of economic advance which is held to be possible only with the help of technology. But it is equally understandable that nationalist, anti-subjectionist motives and attitudes should be integrated with the basic values which are, or are interpreted to be, specific to the culture of the nation."²⁰

It is from this point of view that Gandhi's views on modern civilization can be appreciated.

Evolution of Gandhi's views on civilization

Gandhi in his later days never indulged in a similar trenchant criticism of modern civilization. But it may be

maintained that even as late as 1938 he did not swerve from his original position. In a message to *Aryan Path*, Special Hind Swaraj Number, he wrote : "I have seen nothing to make me alter the views expounded in it." And selected extracts also may be culled out from his later writings and utterances to show that he adhered firmly to the basic tenets propounded in *Hind Swaraj*. While this estimation is valid in so far as his personal faith is concerned, in the larger sphere of public life we find him moving away from his earlier extremist position. His ideas since 1920 evolved well enough to permit limited acculturation and to accept 'the inevitable'. Whether he developed a keen awareness of history in the intervening period is a matter to be discussed separately. But the fact remains that he moved with the times and 'in accordance with the wishes of the people of India'. He was conscious of the fact that the people were not prepared to follow the decree of 'higher simplicity and renunciation' that was necessary for the attainment of 'true civilization' envisaged in *Hind Swaraj*. That was why he could say in 1921 : "I am not aiming at destroying railways or hospitals, though I would certainly welcome their natural destruction...they are a necessary evil. ...Nor am I aiming at a permanent destruction of law courts, much as I regard it as a 'consummation devoutly to be wished'. Still less am I trying to destroy all machinery and mills."²¹

A survey of the rise and development of modern Indian industries would reveal that in spite of the steady industrial expansion between 1890 and 1914, the level of Indian industrial development was low at this period. Progress was achieved primarily in the cotton and jute industries only. Heavy industries were absent. There was a number of reasons why the industrial development of India did not proceed at a greater pace. During the First World War, due to a considerable decline in the import of foreign goods, and also due to war requirements, industries developed further. Lord Hardinge's advocacy of 'a definite and self-conscious policy of improving the industrial capabilities of India' (1915), the appointment of the Industrial Commission in 1916 and the

declaration of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report for 'a forward policy in industrial development' and the recommendation of the Fiscal Commission in 1922 advising the government to inaugurate a policy of 'discriminating protection' which was implemented by the latter in 1923—all these factors helped in the process of industrialization at a relatively accelerated pace. The social significance of this development lies in the fact that industrialization became a national demand. And industrialization is not an isolable feature; it is a part of the general process which includes railways, hospitals, etc., and other material amenities which strike at the root of the values of 'wantlessness' and all that it stands for.

Gandhi was realist enough to feel the atmosphere and concede his idealist position in favour of 'the inevitable'. That he moved away from his earlier anti-Western position to that of cultural pluralism* is clear from the extracts given below.

In 1920 he said: "It [the National University of Gujarat] does not propose merely to feed on, or repeat, the ancient culture. It rather hopes to build a new culture based on the traditions of the past and enriched by the experience of later times. It stands for the synthesis of the different cultures that have come to stay in India, that have influenced Indian life, and that, in their turn, have themselves been influenced by the spirit of the soil. This synthesis will naturally be of the Swadeshi type, where each culture is assured its legitimate place, and not of the American pattern, where one dominant culture absorbs the rest, and where the aim is not towards harmony, but towards an artificial and forced unity."²²

Indeed, he came to accept some aspects of westernization, not as desirable in themselves, but as inevitable forces which might be transformed in their new setting.

In reply to Tagore, during their debate over the meaning of non-co-operation, Gandhi wrote: "I do not want my

* "His ideas resembles what Filmer S. O. Northrop has called 'culturism', the organization of the world for peaceful purposes by admitting deep differences among civilizations and also by acknowledging cultural complementarity"—Paul F. Power, *Gandhi On World Affairs*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1960, p. 134.

house to be walled in all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the culture of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any."²³

In 1931 he wrote: "European civilization is no doubt suited for the Europeans but it will mean ruin for India, if we endeavour to copy it. This is not to say that we may not adopt and assimilate *whatever may be good and capable of assimilation by us* as it does not also mean that even the Europeans will not have to part with whatever evil might have crept into it. ...Let us engrave in our hearts the motto of a Western philosopher, 'Plain living and high thinking'."²⁴ (emphasis added)

In 1936 he was categorical in asserting that "No culture can live, if it attempts to be exclusive."²⁵

He was not a national-chauvinist to reject anything that might emanate from the West. He was against acting 'like a frog in the well'. In 1940 he wrote: "There is nothing to prevent me from profiting by the light that may come from the West. Only I must take care that I am not overpowered by the glamour of the West. I must not mistake the glamour for true light."²⁶

This brief survey would suggest that there took place a transformation in his thought on civilization. Lest there be any misapprehension on this point, a note is to be added. This transformative evolution should not be taken to mean that he cut himself off from the roots or that he deviated from the ideals he cherished. It should not be construed to mean that in his later days he stood for dis-valuing the traditional Indian values. He was for assimilating in Indian culture what was best, no matter from whatever quarter it might come. One may read 'contradiction', or 'a policy of adjustment according to circumstances', or, again, his open-mindedness. But the patent fact of this evolution and its bearing can by no means be underrated.

The cardinal points

Gandhi's views on civilization, briefly outlined above, would suggest that Gandhi did not believe that "multiplication of

wants and machinery contrived to supply them is taking the world a step nearer its goal."²⁷ He was against 'the modern rush' and 'the mad desire to destroy distance and time, to increase animal appetites and go to the ends of the earth in search of their satisfaction'.²⁸ This attitude is rooted in his firm faith in 'wantlessness',* as a desired human virtue. In his words : "Civilization, in the real sense of the term, consist not in the multiplication, but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants."²⁹ This is the real point of difference between Gandhi and most Westerners. It is clearly related to the divergence between the main Christian tradition and an important Hindu tradition concerning the satisfaction of desire.³⁰ This cardinal faith in 'wantlessness' or 'deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants' explains why he attached so much importance to simplicity as a criterion for civilization. Gandhi conceived simplicity to be the essence of civilization.³¹ He was not prepared to barter away the ancient Indian simplicity for the 'tinsel splendour' of the West.³² His insistence on simplicity as a value of life has been generally construed as that of advocating a throw-back to primitivism. But from Gandhi's point of view, "this is not to become primitive. It is only to take up a mode of existence that is instinctive to India."³³ He glorified voluntary poverty. He has been generally misunderstood on this point. He did not ask the masses suffering from grinding poverty to embrace poverty for its own sake. On the other hand, he tried in his own way to improve the living condition of the starving and ill-clad people of the country. *He was against enforced poverty of the*

* "The state of wantlessness is one in which there is no pain and consequently no possibility of getting pleasure...in the state of wantlessness there is happiness as distinguished from pleasure."—J. K. Mehta, *Studies in Advanced Economic Theory*, S. Chand & Co., Delhi, 1957, p. 17.

"Wantlessness consists neither in not eating and drinking, nor in not earning income. All that is required is to do all such things with a selfless motive : to earn not for own use but for the use of all those whom our conscience would like to be served. Such a wantless attitude to life would secure, therefore, not only our own happiness but would enable us to contribute to social welfare. The welfare of an individual would be identified with that of society. Such an identity has been emphasised again and again in scriptures."—*ibid.*, p. 20.

masses.³⁴ Voluntary poverty was for him an ideal to be pursued by those whose lives had been dedicated to a great cause—service to the nation or humanity as a whole. This was an extension of his faith in *aparigraha*, non-possession. His personal faith apart, this ideal of voluntary poverty or renunciation of want and possessions has its relevance to the domain of practical affairs too. While not subscribing to the philosophical creed of Gandhi, one may well appreciate the spirit of idealism (philosophic idealism is not meant here) that underlies this principle. Any significant movement for social reconstruction demands of its adherents idealism, and that too of a lofty standard. One has to pay a price for the idealism he cherishes. Sacrifice there must be, in some form or other, on the part of the participants in the movement and this is more applicable to the persons who are in the van of the movement. In order to build up an authentic mass movement, the leaders must behave in such a way as to appear before the masses at large that they are of the people and not merely for and/or by the people. That means that there must be some identification between the leaders and the people. Voluntary acceptance of poverty—which, because of its nature, is joyful—is a step towards such an identification with the masses of the people. Viewed from this point of view, Gandhi's espousal of voluntary poverty, besides its spiritual significance for whatever it was worth, had a sociological significance too. Gandhi, it is superfluous to add, incarnated this ideal in his own person and identified himself with the people.

It may sound strange, nevertheless it is true that Gandhi stood for life-negation as well as for life-affirmation. In the Gandhian theory of civilization, one finds a synthesis of the spiritual and the temporal.

Criticism of the Gandhian theory of civilization

The Gandhian theory of civilization has been subject to criticism from many quarters. No detailed survey of these criticisms is necessary for our purpose, but a selective reference to these may be useful in forming a balanced opinion of his views.

Writing in Hind Swaraj Special Number of *Aryan Path* the famous ethicist C. Delisle Burns commented : "*Gandhi's first principle is that moral distinctions between good and bad, right and wrong, justice and injustice, are of fundamental importance, as compared with more superficial distinctions between men in race, sex, religion or political opinion. No civilization is at all possible unless this is admitted.*"

But, "On the other hand, there are elements in the teaching of Mahatma Gandhi which are completely mistaken." "...from the point of view of a student of Western civilization", Burns added, "civilization does not consist of trains, tram-cars and hospitals. Nor are lawyers and doctors, whatever their excellences or defects, the chief representatives of Western civilization. ...To condemn Western civilization...because of the mechanisms which are taken to be its characteristic expression, is to misunderstand what is being opposed....There is, indeed, a danger that the teaching of Gandhi may lead back into the old mistake of village-pump politics, in which the distinction between good and evil is identified with the distinction between what is familiar and what is strange. If Gandhi's teaching is to have its highest value in its emphasis upon moral issues and opposition to the private pursuit of wealth and power, it must be freed from the confusion which arises when mechanisms are given the moral qualities which really belong to those who use or misuse them."³⁵

The Christian Socialist John Middleton Murry observed : "I find it impossible to discern any essential difference between Gandhi's vision of real Swaraj and what I believe to be the authentic Christian vision of the Kingdom of Heaven. But there are distinctions. One is that Gandhi can, more easily than we, make his vision concrete by turning to the actual village-community which still survives in India ; whereas the Christian thinker has to turn to the village community of the European Middle Ages. And another more obvious distinction is that, whereas Gandhi has made up his mind that the technical 'civilization' of Europe is altogether evil and is to be wholly rejected, the European Christian thinker is compelled to ask

himself whether it is not absolutely necessary to preserve some basic elements of the mechanical technique...For although the machine—or power-production—has so disastrously become the master instead of the slave of European 'civilization', it does nevertheless offer an immense and universal liberation from human drudgery...*the ultimate social goal of the spiritual leader in the modern world should not be to withdraw backwards to the pre-machine community, but to advance forwards to the creation of a society capable of using the machine without incurring material and spiritual self-devastation*"³⁶

The Fabian Socialist Prof. G. D. H. Cole wrote : "I do not believe that Western civilization is of sharp necessity at enmity with the human soul. I do not believe that science is man's curse, or that the world would be better without doctors or without machines. I do not believe that the peasant life is best, or that home-spun is to be preferred to machine-made, or that it would be better for men to sweep all their discoveries of the past two centuries aside, and go back to take up their lives again at a point, I know not where in history, before these things had become their masters. I make no judgement for Indians concerning the road they should travel ; for I am not competent to make any judgement. But for myself and the men and women I know I am not prepared to say that Western civilization is inherently false to the souls of men."³⁷

The criticisms cited above have been made from the standpoint of Judeo-Christian traditional norms. We have observed above that there is a point of basic difference between the Hindu tradition which Gandhi inherited and the main Christian tradition. A better appreciation of Gandhi's views and their western criticisms can be made if we keep in view that difference of tradition and the approach that follows therefrom.

To add another point : while these critical appreciations were made in 1938, these reviewers did not take into account the later writings of Gandhi and concentrated their attention on *Hind Swaraj*.

Will Durant, referring to Gandhi's views on modern civilization, observed : "The outstanding feature of this philosophy, to

western mind, is its typical resemblance to the romanticism of Rousseau and the 'Young Germany' of Schlegel's days. There is the same resentment against 'civilization', cities and industries ; the same longings for old idealized medieval ways ; the same preference for the East as against the West, like the Slavophilism of Dostoiyeski ; the same zealous nationalism and horror of foreign things ; the same enthusiasm for vernacular languages, the same revival of early literature ; the same call for freedom, based upon the belief in the natural goodness of men. And like every romantic rebel he enlarges his own cause to make it the cause of humanity ; through India he will liberate the world."^{ss}

It would be wrong to suppose that it was the western writers only who could not agree with Gandhi on this particular point. There was a strong section inside the nationalist movement itself which was pronouncedly opposed to the Gandhian theory of civilization. We need not refer to those controversies since they have no particular relevance to our study. But we would like to refer to one appreciative critique of Gandhian philosophy of civilization made from an academic platform. Dr. A. R. Wadia in his Presidential Address to the Indian Philosophical Congress (December, 1930) discussed 'The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi'. While paying his tributes to Gandhi, the learned professor made some critical observations on *Hind Swaraj*, a part of which is given below :

"Gandhiji's moral fervour and austerity evoke our deepest homage, but true morality must flourish not in the artificial atmosphere of studied simplicity, but in the busiest haunts of men. Genuine simplicity belongs to the heart, not to our mere physical environment. He has forgotten the long aeons that the spirit of man has taken to rise above its animal origin and create bit by bit that mighty fabric which we call civilization. Philosophy and ethics did not take their birth in the caves of the cavemen or in the huts of the savages. They awoke when man had conquered nature sufficiently to give him leisure to look around him and think....More than others a great *Karmayogin* like Gandhiji should realize the full significance of *homo*

faber: man as tool-maker....If in the fullness of time man has invented machines. he has not sinned against nature, rather he has fulfilled it, for he has added to the fullness of life. Is he happy?...One can be happy in abject poverty, unhappy in the midst of plenty. Mere happiness is no measure of man's advance....If science and machinery have killed, they have also saved....And where did he [Gandhi] get the inspiration...if not from the 'cursed' civilization of the West? If we in India have to make good our boast that the spirit of India is so broad as to harbour in its bosom varied cultures and varied creeds, we cannot bar the way to industrialism....If the industrialism of the West is really wicked and soulless, it will not do for India to turn her back upon it, but she must spiritualise it and this will be the test of her spirituality."³⁹

This critique stands the test of reason in so far as it questions Gandhi's understanding, or rather the lack of it, of history, but the prescription for 'spiritualising' industrialism betrays an essentially philosophic idealistic approach in place of a concrete, sociological one.

Reflections on Gandhi's theory of civilization

We are living today in a climate of what Sorokin has called 'sensate culture'. Gandhi felt anguished at the spectacle of this soul-killing civilization. He expressed his indignation at what he considered to be immoral. Like Cicero, Kant and Fichte, Gandhi approached social and political problems from the moral point of view. He valued civilization in terms of moral progress. And that was why he could not but denounce the aggressive and materialistic West. Even before Spengler, Gandhi prophesied the decline of Western civilization but he was no pessimist to lose all faith in the rejuvenating power of the human spirit.

In his earlier writings, especially in *Hind Swaraj*, we find Gandhi to be a staunch protagonist of Indian culture and civilization. Objectively considered, this was somewhat in the general direction of the Indian revivalistic movement.⁴⁰ But Gandhi did not raise his voice of protest against the sickening

modern civilization as a matter of formal adherence to ancient Indian civilization, as was the case with many Indian revivalists ; it was much more than and qualitatively different from that. He suggested measures for material improvement without resorting to an imitation of Western civilization. He knew well enough that man does not live by bread alone, but he was equally conscious of the fact that man cannot live without bread too. The age-old spiritual and moral values of India had their deep impress on his mind but he was not that much of a spiritualist to deny the necessity of the basic human needs which demand their satisfaction in material life. This insight or this recognition of the practical⁴¹ led him to suggest measures like the introduction of spinning wheel and other village crafts (for his views on the subject, see ch. 8, sec. 'Khadi' below) which, in addition to being economic devices, symbolized a particular way of life based on certain values which were fundamental for Gandhi. And thus he synthesized between the 'material' and the 'moral'.

As we have noted above, he moved away from his earlier position and recognized the forces at work. One may, on reading *Hind Swaraj*, legitimately question the unrealistic and unhistorical basis of his statement that the rejection of technological civilization in ancient India was due to a deliberate and conscious decision of our wise ancestors. This speaks of his indifference to the development of history, or his innocence about the processes of social evolution. His source of inspiration was the age-old Indian norms* and he saw in those values the final point of the development of human mind. He equated the prevalent value-system of India with what he considered to be fundamental and universal moral values. It did not occur to him that values are historically conditioned. He looked back certainly, but that was not in order to set up a replica of the past for its own charm. When he glorified the past, he did it only to stem the tide of 'the modern rush'. He employed the past, so to say, as a

* The seers of ancient India made a distinction between *preyas* and *śreyas*. (Kāthopaniṣad, Book II) *Śreyas* was the ideal Gandhi strove for.

countervailing measure to the onrush of what he called the 'Satanic' civilization. He might not have the understanding that history could not be reversed ; it could only be reconstructed. He might not also have shared the scientific socialist view that it is only in a society of plenty and abundance—possible only on the basis of higher labour productivity and under full social control—that man can regain his human nature and attain his spiritual development to establish universal brotherhood where the ideal of 'each for all' and 'all for each' will be the guiding principle of life.⁴² But that in no way makes any the less significant the essentially humanistic essence of his opposition to modern civilization. M. de Jouvenal is right in pointing out : 'his was essentially a humanistic critique of industrial civilization.' One may find exaggeration in his criticism of modern civilization but that is all incidental in comparison to his fundamental objections. That the problem of civilization cannot be separated from ethics is a note that has its relevance even today when our social and political life rests on an amoral, if not blatantly immoral, basis. One cannot ignore the force of Gandhi's criticism of modern civilization. As an eminent Indian sociologist put it : "One may not like the manner of his posing the problem, one may consider it as partial, one may dismiss it, if one chooses, as many 'educated' men and industrialists have chosen. But his statements remain a challenge to the entire problem of technological change..."⁴³

Gandhi might not have been able to outline the historically determined path for transcending what Veblen had called 'the predatory phase' of human development, but then there can be no doubt about the fact that he was the man who forged our consciousness about the necessity of effecting a thoroughgoing social change. In its animus, Gandhi's reaction to modern civilization was just, and therein lies its true significance.

The Social Philosophy

We shall now proceed to discuss some of the important Gandhian ideas affecting society as a whole. The importance

of a discussion of his social philosophy in this study lies in the fact that his social ideas were closely and integrally related to his political philosophy, as understood in its broad connotation. But his social views—on family, marriage, equality of women, caste and untouchability, prohibition, population, education, communal peace and amity—however important they might be, cannot be discussed here for obvious reasons. We shall confine ourselves to the problems of (a) caste and untouchability and (b) communal unity which appear to be more relevant to this study.

Caste and Untouchability

Gandhi, as we all know, conceived freedom in its totality. Political freedom and equality, however important, could not have been the end in itself for a man who wanted a sea-change in human relationships. He wanted political freedom as the first condition of the growth of Indian humanity, but he knew well enough that mere attainment of political power would not solve the basic maladies of social and economic inequality. That was why he outlined his philosophy of social integration which he believed as indicating the sure way of bringing about a new order of society. And for him, to believe was to act. He waged battles on all fronts, of course in his own way, to eradicate the evils that stood in the way of social regeneration.

India is a country of enormous variation and long survivals; the institution of caste is one such survival. It is, so to say, 'the steel frame of Hinduism'. The Indian caste system is a big complex composed of various factors. We shall not undertake any sociological inquiry into the origin and existence of the caste system since it is beyond our scope and competence as well. Our primary aim in this study is to examine for ourselves the views held by Gandhi on the problems of caste and untouchability. A perusal of his views⁴⁴ would reveal that he did not cling to his old views when he found them to be inconsistent with ethics which he considered to be fundamental. That shows that his social ideas, like his ideas on economic and political matters, underwent a process of evolution. This

aspect needs to be stressed since his views regarding caste have created a lot of misunderstanding. His defence of the caste system in 1920⁴⁵ gave the impression—such was the impression even of such sympathetic reviewers like C. F. Andrews and Louis Fischer⁴⁶—that he was conservative in this respect although he upheld radical principles in other matters.

Gandhi, as we have seen earlier, was profoundly influenced by Hindu philosophy, tradition and norms. He had an implicit faith in the basic kernels of Hinduism. Though he was a 'reformer through and through', his zeal for reform never led him "to the rejection of any of the essential things in Hinduism."⁴⁷ And *Varṇa* was one such essential thing to Gandhi.

The treatment of society as an organism is much the familiar in traditional Indian thought. The *varṇa* scheme of social organization lends itself to an organismic interpretation, for society is conceived of as a unit consisting of differentiated classes, each functioning in its specific sphere for the good of the entire society.* Gandhi understood Hinduism to be "a living organism liable to growth and decay".⁴⁸

Gandhi upheld the principle of caste division of society so long as it was in conformity with *Varṇa-Dharma*, the original Indian conception of natural classes ; but he was opposed to the caste system as the institution when it had degenerated to a great extent, so that social stratification on the basis of caste had become the order of the day. In order to understand his point of view clearly it would be better if we classify his views on the subject under three headings : (a) his conception of *Varṇa* (b) Caste as *Varṇa* and (c) Caste in practice as distinguished from *Varṇa*.

* "Caste on its social side is a product of human organization and not a mystery of divine appointment. It is an attempt to regulate society with a view to actual differences and ideal unity. The first reference to it is in the *Puruṣa Sūkta*, where the different sections of society are regarded as the limbs of the great self. Human society is an organic whole, the parts of which are naturally dependent in such a way that each part in fulfilling its distinctive function conditions the fulfilment of function by the rest, and is in turn conditioned by the fulfilment of function by the rest. In this sense the whole is present in each part, while each part is indispensable to the whole."—S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1948. p. 107.

(a) *Varna*

"Varnashrama is, in my opinion, inherent in human nature, and Hinduism has simply reduced it to a science. It does attach to birth. A man cannot change his *Varna* by choice. Not to abide by one's *Varna* is to disregard the law of heredity. The division, however, into innumerable castes is an unwarranted liberty taken with the doctrine. The four fold divisions are all-sufficing."⁴⁹

"I regard *Varnashrama* as a healthy division of work based on birth. The present ideas of caste are a perversion of the original. There is no question with me of superiority or inferiority. It is purely a question of duty. I have indeed stated that *varna* is based on birth. But I have also said that it is possible for a *shudra*, for instance, to become a *vaishya*. But in order to perform the duty of a *vaishya* he does not need the label of a *vaishya*. He who performs the duty of a *brahman* will easily become one in the next incarnation."⁵⁰

In a speech delivered at Trivandrum on 9.10.27, he explained *varna* in the following terms :

"So far as I know anything at all of Hinduism, the meaning of *Varna* is incredibly simple. It simply means the following on the part of us all hereditary and traditional calling of our forefathers, in so far as the traditional is not inconsistent with fundamental ethics, and this only for the purpose of earning one's livelihood. I regard this as the law of our being. ...You will realize that if all of us follow this law of *Varna* we would limit our material ambition, and our energy would be set free for exploring those vast fields whereby and where through we can know God."⁵¹

Again, "*Varnashrama Dharma* defines man's mission on this earth. He is not born day after day to explore avenues for amassing riches and to explore different means of livelihood ; on the contrary man is born in order that he may utilize every atom of his energy for the purpose of knowing his Maker. It restricts him therefore, for the purpose of holding body and soul together, to the occupation of his forefathers. That and nothing more or nothing less is *Varnashrama Dharma*."⁵²

Gandhi laid stress on functions being hereditary, because, in his opinion, heredity is a law of nature. But he was not for exclusive, watertight divisions. Though he believed that *varna* was closely related to birth, yet he did not subscribe to the view, as has been wrongly ascribed to him by Dr. G. S. Ghurye⁵³ that "one born a Brahmin always a Brahmin."

In his words: "Varna is determined by birth, but can be retained only by observing its obligations. One born of Brahmana parents will be called a Brahmana, but if his life fails to reveal the attributes of a Brahmana when he comes of age, he cannot be called a Brahmana. He will have fallen from Brahmanhood. On the other hand, one who is born not a Brahmana but reveals in his conduct the attributes of a Brahmana will be regarded as a Brahmana, though he will himself disclaim the label."⁵⁴

(b) *Caste as Varna*

Gandhi extended his support to the ideal caste system, and not to its perversion. He equated the theory of caste with the law of *varna*. Gandhi held that the caste institution had its value when considered from economic, political and spiritual angles. Gandhi accepted the functional basis of caste and there he was in the company of eminent sociologists.

In 1921 he wrote: "From the economic point of view, its value was once very great. It ensured hereditary skill; it limited competition. It was the best remedy against pauperism. And it had all the advantages of trade guilds. Although it did not foster adventure or invention there, it is not known to have come in the way either.

"Historically speaking, caste may be regarded as man's experiment or social adjustment in the laboratory of Indian society. If we can prove it to be a success, it can be offered to the world as a leaven and as the best remedy against heartless competition and social disintegration born of avarice and greed."⁵⁵

And, "The vast organization of caste answered not only the religious wants of community but it answered its political needs. The villagers managed their internal affairs through the

caste system, and through it they dealt with any oppression from the ruling power or powers. It is not possible to deny of a nation that was capable of producing the caste system its wonderful power of organization."⁵⁶

Gandhi defined his ideal social order in 1934 in the following terms :

"I believe that every man is born in the world with certain natural tendencies. Every person is born with certain definite limitations which he cannot overcome. From a observation of those limitations the law of *varna* was deduced. It establishes certain spheres of action for certain people with certain tendencies. This avoided all unworthy competition. Whilst recognizing limitations the law of *varna* admitted of no distinctions of high and low : on the one hand it guaranteed to each the fruits of his labours and on the other it prevented him from pressing upon his neighbour. This great law has been degraded and fallen into disrepute. But my conviction is that an ideal social order will only be evolved when the implications of this law are fully understood and given effect to.

Q. Do you not think that in ancient India there was much difference in economic status and social privileges between the four *varnas* ?

A. That may be historically true. But misapplication or an imperfect understanding of the law must not lead to the ignoring of the law itself. By constant striving we have to enrich the inheritance left to us. This law determines the duties of man. Rights follow from a due performance of duties."⁵⁷

(c) *Caste in practice as distinguished from Varna*

Gandhi considered the four divisions alone to be fundamental, natural and essential. He felt that "the innumerable sub-castes are sometimes a convenience, often a hindrance. The sooner there is fusion the better."⁵⁸ In the same article he added that "there appears to be no valid reason for ending the system because of its abuse." But he became gradually convinced that caste as an institution was a travesty of *varna*

and emphatically declared : "Varna has nothing to do with caste. Down with the monster of caste that masquerades in the name of *Varna*."⁵⁹ In the same strain he said : "*Varnashrama* of the *Shastras* is today non-existent in practice. The present caste system is the very antithesis of *varnashrama*. The sooner public opinion abolishes it the better."⁶⁰ Though he called himself a *Sanātani* Hindu, yet it was he who could assert : "Caste has nothing to do with religion. It is harmful both to spiritual and national growth."⁶¹ In 1937, in reply to an American clergyman, he categorically stated : "Hinduism does not believe in caste."⁶² In 1946, he stated that "caste is an anachronism."⁶³ These utterances suggest that he moved ahead of his earlier position of 1920* which created the impression that he was out-and-out conservative in social matters.

Interdining and intermarriage

That there took place an evolution of his views on caste is clearly evident from his utterances and writings on interdining and intermarriage. In 1921 he wrote : "I do not believe that interdining or even intermarriage necessarily deprives a man of his status that his birth has given him. The four divisions define a man's calling, they do not restrict or regulate social intercourse. The divisions define duties, they confer no privileges....

"Though therefore *varnashrama* is not affected by interdining and intermarriage, Hinduism does most emphatically discourage interdining and intermarriage between divisions. Hinduism reached the highest limit of self-restraint. It undoubtedly is a religion of renunciation of the flesh so that the spirit may be set free. It is no part of a Hindu's duty to dine with his son. And by restricting his choice of a bride to a particular group, he exercises rare self-restraint....

* But it is to be noted here that in South Africa, even as early as 1909, Gandhi had publicly decried the caste system for its inequalities ; its 'hypocritical distinctions of high and low' and 'caste tyranny' which had made India 'turn (her) back on truth and embrace falsehood'.—'My Second Experience in Gaol [—V] in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, The Publications Division, Govt. of India, 1963, Vol. 9, pp. 180-1.

Prohibition against intermarriage and interdining is essential for a rapid evolution of the soul. But this self-denial is no test of *varna*. A *brahmana* may remain a *brahmana* though he may dine with his *shudra* brother, if he has not left off his duty of service by knowledge. It follows from what I have said above, that restraint in matters of marriage and dining is not based upon notions of superiority. A Hindu who refuses to dine with another from a sense of superiority misrepresents his *dharma*."⁶⁴

In a statement dated 4 November 1932 issued from Yeravda prison after his epic fast, he said : "Correspondents have asked whether interdining and intermarriage are a part of the movement against untouchability. In my opinion they are not. They touch the castemen equally with the outcastes. It is, therefore, not obligatory on an anti-untouchability worker to devote himself or herself to interdining and intermarriage reform. Personally, I am of opinion that this reform is coming sooner than we expect. Restriction on intercaste dining and intercaste marriage is no part of Hindu religion. It is a social custom which crept into Hinduism when perhaps it was in its decline, and was then meant perhaps to be a temporary protection against disintegration of Hindu society. Today these two prohibitions are weakening Hindu society, and emphasis on them has turned the attention of mass mind from the fundamentals which are vital to life's growth. Wherever, therefore, people voluntarily take part in functions where 'touchables' and 'untouchables', Hindus and non-Hindus are invited to join dinner parties, I welcome them as a healthy sign. But I should never dream of making this reform, however desirable in itself it may be, part of an all-India reform which has been long overdue.

"Untouchability in the form we all know it is a canker eating into the very vitals of Hinduism. Dining and marriage restrictions stunt Hindu society. I think the distinction is fundamental. It would be unwise in a hurricane campaign to overweight and thus endanger the main issue. It may even amount to a breach of faith with the masses to call upon them

suddenly to view the removal of untouchability in a light different from what they have been taught to believe it to be. On the one hand, therefore, whilst interdining may go on where the public is itself ready for it, it should not be part of an India-wide campaign."^{65*}

In 1933 he wrote : "Interdining and inter-caste marriage are in no way essential for the promotion of the spirit of brotherhood or for the removal of untouchability."⁶⁶

In 1935 he said : "In *Varnashrama* there was and there should be no prohibition of intermarriage or interdining.

"Though there is in *Varnashrama* no prohibition against intermarriage and interdining, there can be no compulsion. It must be left to the unfettered choice of the individual as to where he or she will marry or dine. If the law of *Varnashrama* was observed there would naturally be a tendency, so far as marriage is concerned, for people to restrict the marital relations to their own *varna*."⁶⁷

He had been pursuing a vigorous but cautious approach in his campaign against untouchability. He held earlier that interdining and intermarriage were no part of the movement of untouchability (1932 statement quoted above). In 1942 he wrote that when he said that he had the general Hindu public in mind, not the Congress workers or Congressmen."⁶⁸

In 1946 he moved further. In reply to a question whether the Congress programme for the abolition of untouchability included interdining and intermarriage with Harijans, he said : "So far as I know the Congress mind today there is no opposition to dining with Harijans. But speaking for myself, I have said that we have all to become Harijans today or we will not be able

* Regarding the above two passages and their apparent inconsistency, Gandhi wrote in answer to a correspondent's question :

"As I read them with a detached mind, I find no contradiction between the two statements especially if they are read in their full context. I still believe that restriction imposed by oneself upon interdining and intermarriage is an act of renunciation of the flesh. There is one word that perhaps I would change if I was writing the article of 1921 today. Instead of 'prohibition', I should repeat the expression used in the same article just a few lines before and say 'self-imposed restriction against intermarriage and interdining is essential for a rapid evolution of the soul'."—*Harijan*, 29.4.33, p. 2.

to purge ourselves completely of the taint of untouchability. I, therefore, tell all boys and girls who want to marry that they cannot be married at Sevagram Ashram unless one of the parties is a Harijan. I am convinced that there is no real difficulty in this. All that is needed is a change of outlook."⁶⁹

And, "At one time I did say that interdining was not an essential part of the campaign for the removal of untouchability. Personally, I was for it. Today I encourage it. In fact, today I even go further."⁷⁰

Inter-religious marriage

In fact he went further. Gandhi advanced to the ideal of free inter-religious marriage. He held that there could be no bar to marriage between persons professing different religions.

"Q. You advocate inter-caste marriage. Do you also favour marriage between Indians professing different religions? Should they declare themselves as belonging to no denomination, or can they continue their old religious practices and yet intermarry? If so, what form should the marriage ceremony take? Is it to be a purely civil function or a religious function?

Do you consider religion to be exclusively a personal matter?

A. Though Gandhiji admitted that he had not always held the view, he had come to the conclusion long ago that an inter-religious marriage was a welcome event whenever it took place. His stipulation was that such connection was not a product of lust. In his opinion it was no marriage. It was illicit intercourse. Hence there must be mutual friendship, either party having equal respect for the other. There was no question in this of conversion. Hence the marriage ceremony would be performed by the priests belonging to either faith. This happy event could take place when the communities shed mutual enmity and had regard for the religions of the world."⁷¹

"Q. You say that you are in favour of inter-religious marriages but at the same time you say that each party should retain his or her own religion and, therefore, you said, you tolerated even civil marriages. Are there any instances of parties belonging to different religions keeping up their own religions to the end of

their lives ? And is not the institution of civil marriage a negation and does it not tend towards laxity of religion ?

A. Gandhiji said that the questions were appropriate. He had no instances in mind where the parties had clung to their respective faiths upto death, because these friends whom he knew had not yet died. He had, however, under his observation men and women professing different religions and each clinging to his or her own faith without abatement. But he would go so far as to say that they need not wait for discovery of past instances. They should create new ones so that the timid ones may shed their timidity.

As to civil marriages, he did not believe in them, but he welcomed the institution of civil marriage as a much-needed reform for the sake of reform."⁷²

That this was indeed an advance becomes clearly evident when his earlier position of 1920 is considered side by side.

In an article in *Young India* (25.2.1920) entitled 'Hindu-Mahomedan Unity' he wrote : "In my opinion, the idea that interdining or intermarrying is necessary for national growth, is a superstition borrowed from the West."

"I hold it to be utterly impossible for Hindu and Mohamedans to intermarry and yet retain in tact each other's religion. And the true beauty of Hindu-Mahomedan Unity lies in each remaining true to his own religion and yet being true to each other."⁷³

Untouchability

Untouchability is an inhuman institution in Hindu society. Hallowed with tradition and sanctified by religion, it continued to exist in all its oppressive facets for centuries. History has known hierarchically graded societies of various types in different epochs and among different peoples. All these societies were based on social privileges and inequalities. However, no hierarchically graded society can compare with the Hindu society in its extreme gradation of ranks and inequalities of rights. Hardly any society condemned a section of it to physical segregation as the Hindu society did in the

case of the untouchables.⁷⁴ The mere touch of an untouchable was a sin. In some parts of India, especially in the South, not only untouchability was practised on a vast scale, but unapproachability and invisibility too.

Gandhi's sensitive soul rebelled against this outrage of human personality and human dignity. His campaigns against untouchability are too well known to be recounted here. He identified himself with the untouchables, calling himself a *Harijan*.^{*} It was his deep concern for the depressed humanity that guided him to launch his nation-wide reform movement. This feeling for the down-and-out masses was more or less instinctive with him. In his words:

"I was hardly yet twelve when this idea had dawned on me. A scavenger named Uka, an 'untouchable', used to attend our house for cleaning latrines. Often I would ask my mother why it was wrong to touch him, why I was forbidden to touch him. If I accidentally touched Uka, I was asked to perform ablutions and though I naturally obeyed, it was not without smilingly protesting that untouchability was not sanctioned by religion, that it was impossible that it should be so. I was a very dutiful and obedient child, and so far as it was consistent with respect for parents, I often had tussles with them on this matter. I told my mother that she was entirely wrong in considering physical contact with Uka as sinful.

"While at school I would often happen to touch the 'untouchables', and as I never would conceal the fact

* The employment of the term 'Harijan' offers a good example of Gandhi's symbolic language. Hindu social reformers referred to untouchables usually in terms of 'pariah' or the victims of 'don't touchism'. For years, Gandhi himself used 'bhāṅgi', 'untouchable', 'unapproachable', 'Pañcama', or 'Antyaja' (the last born). Then, in August 1931, he wrote that at last he had found the right word: 'Harijan'. "It was a word", he told us, "used by the great saint, Narasinha Mehta", a Nagar Brāhmana "who defied the whole community by claiming the 'untouchable' as his own." "I am delighted to adopt the word", he continued, "which is sanctified by having been used by such a great saint, but it has for me a deeper meaning than you may imagine. The 'untouchable', to me, is, compared to us, really a 'Harijan'—a man of God, and we are *Durjan*, men of evil."—*Young India*, 6. 8. 1931, in *The Removal of Untouchability*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1954, p. 14.

from my parents, my mother would tell me that the shortest cut to purification after the unholy touch was to cancel the touch by touching a Musalman passing by. And simply out of reverence and regard for my mother I often did so, but never did so believing it to be a religious obligation.

"The Ramayana used to be regularly read in our family. 'How can the Ramayana', I thought to myself, 'in which one who is regarded nowadays as an 'untouchable' took Rama across the *Ganga* in his boat, countenance the idea of any human beings being 'untouchables' on the ground that they were polluted souls?' The fact that we addressed God as the 'purifier of the polluted' and by similar appellations, shows that it is a sin to regard any one born in Hinduism as polluted or 'untouchable'—that it is Satanic to do so. I have hence been never tired of repeating that it is a great sin. I do not pretend that this thing had crystallized as a conviction in me at the age of twelve, but I do say that I did then regard untouchability as a sin."⁷⁵

This long extract is given only to show that it was not with any ulterior political purpose or any other end in view that he had organized the movement. The aim of the anti-untouchability campaign was primarily and essentially humanitarian. But this does not mean that the problem of emancipation of about one-fifth of the total Hindu population (1931 census) was less important in any scheme of national freedom and social reconstruction in India. Indeed, how could the freedom movement at all march forward keeping such a vast mass of the toiling people beyond the pale of society? In that sense it had a bearing on the political movement, though not in any narrow sense.

* "Swaraj is a meaningless term, if we desire to keep a fifth of India under perpetual subjection, and deliberately deny to them the fruits of national culture. We are seeking the aid of God in this great purifying movement, but we deny to the most deserving among His creatures the rights of humanity. Inhuman ourselves, we may not plead before the Throne for deliverance from the inhumanity of others."—*Young India*, 25.5.21, p. 165.

Untouchability, he maintained, was no part of Hinduism. He wrote : "Untouchability is not only not a part and parcel of Hinduism, but a plague, which it is the bounden duty of every Hindu to combat."⁷⁶ In a speech in 1925 he cried out in agony : "If this is Hinduism, O Lord, my fervent prayer is that the soonest it is destroyed, the best."⁷⁷

The feeling of identification with the suppressed humanity was so deep as to evoke the following statement :

"I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should be born an untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings, and affronts levelled at them, in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from that miserable condition. I, therefore, pray that if I should be born again, I should do so not as a *brahmana*, *kshatriya*, *vaishya* or *shudra*, but as an *ati-shudra*."⁷⁸

Gandhi put the entire responsibility for the 'cancer of untouchability' on the caste-Hindus. He said categorically : "Let me tell you that it is not enough for you to hold the belief passively that untouchability is a crime. He who is a passive spectator of crime is really, and in law, an active participator in it. You must therefore begin and continue your agitation along all lawful and legitimate lines."⁷⁹ He was of the opinion that the caste-Hindu owed a sacred duty to the so-called untouchables. He must become a *bhāṅgī* (sweeper) in name and action. When that happened the untouchables would rise at a bound and Hinduism would leave a rich legacy to the world.⁸⁰

But it was not merely a Hindu social reform movement for Gandhi. He ascribed a wider meaning to the movement against 'the monster of untouchability'. "My own innermost desire is not that the brotherhood of Hindus only may be achieved, but it essentially is that the brotherhood of man—be he Hindu, Musalman, Christian, Parsi or Jew—may be realized."⁸¹ He yearned for one human family to grow. In his words : "The ulcer of untouchability has gone so deep down that it seems to pervade our life. Hence the unreal differences : Brahmana and Non-Brahmana, provinces and

provinces, religion and religion. Why should there be all this poison smelling of untouchability? Why should we not all be children of one Indian family and, further, of one human family? Are we not like branches of the same tree?

"When untouchability is rooted out, these distinctions will vanish and no one will consider himself superior to any other. Naturally, exploitation too will cease and co-operation will be the order of the day."⁸²

The outline-survey given above indicates three salient features: (a) Gandhi's allegiance to *Varna* as the fundamental law of life governing the human family, (b) his belief that caste as it was practised was an anachronism for the present society—here we find a marked advance from his earlier views, and (c) his passion against the evil of untouchability.

A brief survey of opinions

Gandhi's advocacy of the *Varna* system has been much criticized. Dr. Ambedkar, after branding Gandhi as 'a social reactionary', said: "Mr. Gandhi may be taken to be not in favour of caste. But Mr. Gandhi does not say that he is against the *Varna* system. And what is Mr. Gandhi's *Varna* system? It is simply a new name for the caste system and retains all the worst features of the caste system."⁸³

Dr. G. S. Ghurye has understood Gandhi to be advocating a throwback to the past: "There were those who believed that the best way to bring about the desired end was to hark back to the imagined pure state of Hindu society which was characterized by the existence of only the four traditional castes, viz. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. The greatest exponent of this point of view was Mahatma Gandhi...

"Altogether it appears to me that a return to the fourfold division of society is impracticable, and even if accomplished would serve no more useful purpose than that of reminding us of our past heritage."⁸⁴

In S. Natarajan's estimate: "Gandhi's entry into the social reform field was a somewhat ambiguous one; and his insistence that he had differences with 'orthodox' reformers was more

than justified. The vehement language in which he denounced the observance of untouchability, roused a certain resistance in the orthodox, specially in Bombay city.....But elsewhere his repudiation of interdining and his acceptance of the caste won over the orthodox. Moreover, his repeated insistence that the caste Hindus should be persuaded, was a flattering approach to reactionaries—particularly while they did not realize what forms Gandhian persuasion could take."⁸⁵

According to Charles H. Heimsath : "The social reformers had to reject Gandhi's position—to give up caste and retain the four varnas—just as they had rejected the identical position taken by Dayananda Saraswati.....The reformers realised that nothing practical would be gained if Hindus were to re-classify themselves into varnas, and in any case it would be impossible to give real effect to such a procedure."⁸⁶

Prof. Oliver Cromwell Cox maintains "that Gandhi himself who knows the Christian Gospels well is still unable to rise far beyond the principles of impurity and its logical extreme, untouchability....The Mahatma would probably do the impossible : remove untouchability but otherwise maintain the caste system in tact."⁸⁷

Dr. T. K. N. Unnithan says : "Without attacking the principle that created the structure of the caste system, he considered it practical to eliminate its vices by the reformation of the individual. If all members of the society did not observe the obsolete caste regulations or untouchability, the system would automatically cease to function. The improbability of this occurring in reality is obvious. This is the difficulty that confronts us with most of the Gandhian propositions. Perhaps it was the only course open to him in view of his advocacy of the principle of non-violence as the law that should govern all practical attempts at reformation. Because if he attacked the theory as such, it would have probably created a sudden break in orthodox social tendencies which in turn might have culminated in disharmony, violence and upheavals. It is to prevent this and to effect a more harmonious

and non-violent change that he naturally had to resort to this method."⁸⁸

Dennis Dalton notes : "Above all, Gandhi sought, in so far as it was possible for a moral reformer in India, to promote social harmony and not to provoke abrupt change with violent consequences....there is little novelty in Gandhi's position on caste. Except, that is, for the element of style...The admixture of continuity and innovation...always characterized his style...."⁸⁹

Louis Rencu, the famous Indologist, has mentioned in this connexion : "His [Gandhi's] social ideal was not so much to abolish caste as to offset its effects, while maintaining (at least for the present) the framework of the four great social divisions going back to the remotest past. This is the teaching of the Buddha himself, of the sages and thinkers of ancient or medieval India, and it is the impression derived from Sanskrit literature, which, taken as a whole, ignores the 'caste' (jati) and recognizes only the class (Varna)."⁹⁰

Dr. Viswanath Prasad Varma observes : "The defence of the varnashrama is not a conservative apology for traditional social system. ...Gandhi was a reformer through and through but he did not like to give a rough handling to social patterns for the sheer delight of novelty and social experimentation.... It appears that with the passage of time Gandhi's historicist conservatism slightly yielded place to some kind of radical social equalitarianism."⁹¹

Dr. Joan V. Bondurant holds : "The revolutionary character of the Gandhian approach may be seen...in his opinion on the orthodox rules governing interdining. ...Gandhi himself promoted many marriages across caste lines and his ashram society was organised entirely without caste distinction. ...The continuing campaign Gandhi conducted against untouchability is, again, telling evidence of his abiding concern for the reconstruction of the institutions and approaches of his own society. ...Gandhi pressed his campaign to overcome discrimination and the fear and weaknesses which arise from it. In so doing he undermined some of the most sacred institutions of his society."⁹²

Gunnar Myrdal in his *Asian Drama* points out: "When it came to the social aspects of caste and the status of women, Gandhi was an uncompromising radical leveller and never more so than in his later years. Throughout his life Gandhi was adamant in his condemnation of untouchability. It is true that in preaching an all-embracing, tolerant syncretism he sought to defend a purified and functional caste system as a means of social organization. But he was opposed to the caste system as it existed in India."⁹³

Reflections on Gandhi's views

In our opinion Gandhi's advocacy of *Varṇa Dharma* was primarily guided by his attachment to the *Gītā*. The *Gītā* stands for an organic, as distinct from an atomistic, conception of society.⁹⁴ The *Gītā* insists on each order performing its own specific duties which constitute its *dharma*: "Better one's own duty, bereft of merit, than another's well-performed; better is death in the discharge of one's duties: another's duty is fraught with danger."⁹⁵ Gandhi had the following comments to offer on the stanza quoted above: "One man's duty may be to serve the community by working as a sweeper, another's may be to work as an accountant. An accountant's work may be more inviting, but that need not draw the sweeper away from his work. Should he allow himself to be drawn away he would himself be lost and put the community into danger. Before God the work of man will be judged by the spirit in which it is done, not by the nature of the work which makes no difference whatsoever. Whoever acts in a spirit of dedication fits himself for salvation."⁹⁶ It may be noted here that the *Gītā* rationalized the traditional division of labour and invested it with spiritual significance. In the *Gītā* we read that the four-fold division of *varṇa* was based on differences of *karma* and *guṇa*. Gandhi while upholding *varṇa* laid stress on these aspects. He accepted the teachings of the *Gītā* to be fundamental, universal and proclaiming the ultimate truth and he saw in the restoration of the true *varṇāśramadharmā* the path of salvation. He did not care to find out that the

philosophy of the *Gītā* was evolved at a particular period of Indian history and that like all philosophies the *Gītā* too represented a particular mode of approach corresponding to the material development of the then society.⁹⁷ This indifference to time, a characteristic of the Hindu mind, resulted in his unhistorical faith that *varṇa* was the ideal scheme of social organization for all times.

He understood *varṇa dharma* as representing the natural order of society. And the natural was the perfect for him. It may be presumed that his urge for the natural, the perfect and the simple led him to advocate *varṇāśramadharmā* as the sure way of getting out of the monstrous division of society based on innumerable castes and sub-castes.

But it was not merely the basic religious faith that was responsible for his holding such a view ; it was much more. If we read his views on *varṇa* and caste carefully we may be able to discern some sociological concepts involved in this theory. The organismic conception of society is conceived in terms of differentiation and integration. Gandhi, it seems, understood the four-fold division of society in that light. *Varṇa*, or the original caste order of society, it is claimed, was evolved for maintaining social equilibrium. That Gandhi understood the caste institution in that perspective and not in terms of social distance is evident from his writings. He categorically said : "I believe in the rock-bottom doctrine of Advaita and my interpretation of Advaita excludes totally any idea of superiority at any stage whatsoever."⁹⁸ His faith in the oneness of humanity⁹⁹ impelled him to move for the obliteration of the caste system that perpetuated social distance.

That he was against social distance among the different castes would be evident if we refer to his insistence on bread labour as a fundamental law of our being, a law common to all the *varṇas*.^{100*} In his opinion, "a Brahman is not only a teacher. He is only predominantly that. But a Brahman who refused to

* For his views on bread labour, see ch. 8, sec. 'Bread Labour'.

labour will be voted down as an idiot."¹⁰¹ The introduction of the concept of bread labour in a hierarchical, authoritarian society was of great import in that it undermined the very basis of social distance institutionalized through the caste system.

In our study of the evolution of his views on interdining and intermarriage we have seen how he progressed from his somewhat closed outlook to a broad, liberal view of things. Restrictions regarding dining and endogamy are the formidable pillars which sustain the caste structure. And advocacy of interdining and intermarriage, even inter-religious marriage, in authoritarian Hindu society certainly speaks of a freshness and vigour of mind.

One can find traces of conservatism in his earlier views, but his later writings dispel that misgiving. His basic allegiance to *varna* may be construed as a plea for perpetuating the caste system by 'a new name', as has indeed been held by Dr. Ambedkar and others. But this construction seems to suffer from a subjective approach. It would be more logical to hold that Gandhi pursued a slow but steady approach for the removal of caste distinctions. That was his technique of movement—which fitted in well with his reliance on the individual. He believed that reforms could only begin with individuals. His practical sense might have dictated him to prepare the ground first and then strike at the root. As was his wont, "he seized upon the traditional only to transform it."¹⁰² Gandhi's views may be better appreciated from such a standpoint.

Gandhi passionately struggled for the liquidation of untouchability. He endeavoured to awaken the conscience of the upper caste Hindus against this infamy of ages.

What was the significance of this movement? We would like to share the view of Prof. N. K. Bose who holds: "Mahatma Gandhi's Harijan movement did succeed in focussing the attention of the public on the wrongs suffered by the suppressed classes under Hinduism. It has succeeded in bringing about a psychological transformation in the attitude of the two classes (touchables and untouchables) towards one another."¹⁰³

To sum up, the problems of caste and untouchability are related to the material basis of social organization. Abolition of caste and untouchability demands a basic socio-economic reconstruction.¹⁰⁴ One may hold that Gandhi's social ideas had not provided that philosophy of revolutionary change—but that is a matter of opinion. One may not also like the manner of his posing the problem. Still there can be no two opinions as to the fact that Gandhi's views largely influenced and accelerated the pace of the social reform movement. An objective appraisal suggests that the anti-untouchability movement served the purpose of awakening the conscience of the nation against this evil. And that was no mean achievement considering the period when Gandhi launched his crusade against this 'human sin'. This movement was the expression and growth of the larger national and human consciousness of the Indian people. On the one hand, the national movement contributed, though slowly, towards the dissolution of caste distinctions. And on the other, the anti-untouchability movement, in its turn, contributed towards the building up of the Indian people on a democratic basis.¹⁰⁵ Gandhi's social philosophy was valid in so far as it could create a climate of democratic consciousness. And who can deny that consciousness is the propelling factor of social action? Democratic consciousness, slowly but surely, saps the foundations of anachronistic social institutions and social inequality.

Gandhi's Ideals of Communal Unity

The communal question was one of the outstanding problems of the Indian nationalist movement. Even today few questions in this country arouse such intense passion and controversy as the question of relationship between its two major communities, the Hindus and the Muslims. Communalism had as its cause varied and intricate factors—political, economic, religious, psychological and so on. But it was mainly the result of the peculiar development of the Indian social economy under the British rule, of the uneven economic and cultural development of different communities, and of the action of the strategy of

both the British government and the vested interests within those communities.^{106*}

Communalism in India may be defined "as that ideology which emphasizes as the social, political, and economic unit the group of adherents of each religion, and emphasizes the distinction, even the antagonism, between such groups; the words 'adherent' and 'religion' being taken in the most literal sense."¹⁰⁷

In imposing its categories of thought upon its victims, it aimed at exterminating all other sociological and political categories. In raising and making supreme the communal issue, it confused, if it did not suppress, every other issue—political, social economic, and even religious.¹⁰⁸

A survey of the political history of India during British rule, more particularly of this century, would reveal how the contagion of communalism perverted the social content of the anti-imperialist people's movement and frustrated the genuine aspirations and logical culmination of the nationalist struggle. But it is not our purpose to relate that story here. We shall confine ourselves to a discussion, however brief, of Gandhi's ideals of communal harmony.

Hindu-Muslim unity was a part of his very being. It was the breath of his life. Gandhi was from his early youth a votary of amity between people of different denominations. It was rather at an early stage of his public life in South Africa that Gandhi felt the necessity of communal unity. Throughout his public life of fifty odd years he symbolized in himself the message of brotherhood among communities. As the "generalissimo" of the nation, as Mahomed Ali called him from the presidential chair of the Indian National Congress at Coconada (1923), he naturally

* cf. "...the Hindus, Muslims and the British governments constitute the three arms of the communal triangle. From other considerations also, the question assumes a triangular shape. The political arm of the triangle is generally the best known, since it is the most obvious. But complex problems do not always admit of simple and cut-and-dry explanations. While the political aspect has an importance all its own, it is by no means the only aspect of the communal problem. There are other forces whose influence must be adequately appraised. One such is the sociological basis of the communal problem. The other is the irrational factor..." —Asoka Mehta and Achyut Patwardhan, *The Communal Triangle in India*, Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1942, pp. 7-8.

looked at the political aspect of the problem. But he was no ordinary politician in the usually understood sense of the term. The question of communal peace had a broader appeal for him. He believed in the fundamental unity of all religions. In his words: "I write in the name and for the sake of heart-unity which I want to see established among the people of this land professing different faiths. In nature there is a fundamental unity running through all the diversity we see about us. Religions are no exceptions to the natural law. They are given to mankind so as to accelerate the process of realization of fundamental unity."¹⁰⁹ He preached equal regard for all religions throughout his life. "The key to the solution of the tangle lies in everyone following the best in his own religion and entertaining equal regard for the other religions and their followers."¹¹⁰

Another basic point in his approach to the communal problem was that he pleaded for generosity on the part of the majority community. "It would be a great thing for the Hindus to achieve this act of self-denial."¹¹¹

But it was no naive faith in fundamental unity of all religions that impelled him to dedicate his life for the preservation of communal unity. He had a strong political sense to understand that the foreign rulers had been pursuing the policy of divide-and-rule to keep going their administration and exploitation. "My case is that alien rulers India have ruled India on the principle of divide and rule. No alien imperial rule could go on in India unless the rulers coquetted now with the one and then with the other party. We will continue to be divided so long as the wedge of the foreign rule remains there and sink deeper and deeper. That is the way of the wedge. But take out the wedge and the split parts will instantly come together and unite..."¹¹²

Though it can be said quite legitimately that his plea for communal unity was advocacy rather than analysis, yet that should not lead to the conclusion that he was absolutely unconvincant with the sociological basis of the problem. The following will suggest that he could at least perceive, if not

actually comprehend, the genetic cause of communal conflict.

"Q. The majority of the Socialists claim that if there was a socialist revolution the economic question will come to the forefront throwing the communal conflict in the background. Do you agree ?

A. The economic conflict...is likely to make the Hindu-Muslim tension less acute."¹¹³

Gandhi all along contested the theory that the Muslims in India were a separate nation. He denied the religious basis of nationhood.¹¹⁴ He was opposed to the vivisection or any partition of the country on communal basis. In his words : "The 'two-nation' theory is an untruth."¹¹⁵ But the tragic reality took place despite Gandhi's pronounced opinion on the subject. It is a grim saga written in the blood of the lakhs of our countrymen. It is for the historians to trace the development of that fateful event. The fact of the partition notwithstanding, Gandhi tried to hold the citadel alone and he ploughed a lonely furrow for restoring communal peace in both the parts of this sub-continent. That story of lofty nobleness is a memory to be treasured by humanity at large. The last phase of his life outshone even the magnificent deeds of his earlier years. He wrote : "I am striving to become the best cement between the two communities. My longing is to be able to cement the two with my blood, if necessary."¹¹⁶ How prophetic were these words !

Gandhi was an anti-communalist *par excellence*. He interpreted all religions as clarion calls for the establishment of human brotherhood. He stood for a secular state¹¹⁷ permeated by the spirit of democratic human values.

The tragic fact, however, emerges that despite the intensity and extension of the nationalist movement, inter-communal relations grew from bad to worse and culminated in the vivisection of the country.

Gandhi, inspite of his superhuman efforts, could not prevent the country from being divided into two parts because it was in the process of the growth and development of 'two nationalisms' in our country. Gandhi traced the roots of the Hindu-Muslim

antagonism not to the material life-processes of the Indian society but to the weak ethical structure of the people.¹¹⁸ And therein lay the limitations of his noble humanistic attempts to cement the two communities. This comment is offered not to underrate his ideal of communal unity, nor even to minimise his greatness, but to look at that greatness in its true socio-historical perspective which enables one to measure greatness correctly and adequately, if greatness can at all be measured.

A spate of criticism has been made both during his lifetime and after his death that his approach to the communal problem was all wrong, that he by invocation of Hindu terminologies like *Rāma Rājya* alienated the Muslim masses from the sphere of nationalist movement, etc. Whether those appraisals, if they are worth anything, will stand the test of objective analysis are for the historians to judge.

Interpreters and commentators may busy themselves in finding out whether his efforts were crowned with success or ended in tragic failure but the posterity shall certainly acclaim him as one of the noblest spirits that walked upon this earth. The solutions he suggested might have betrayed inadequate comprehension of the problem but the high idealism that he preached and symbolized in his being shall for ever be a constant source of inspiration to all those who want to establish a new order based on human love and brotherhood. And who knows not that idealism sustains ?